Fattening Lambs for Market

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During the last four years, eight feeding trials in fattening lambs for market have been conducted by the University of Minnesota. The lambs have been fed at the West Central Experiment Station, Morris, Minnesota, under the supervision of P. S. Jordan, animal husbandman at that station. In all, 1,920 lambs have been fed in 64 lots of 30 lambs each.

Many different types of lambs as feeding lambs, many different feeds and combinations of feeds, and many different methods of feeding have been tried out in these trials. A few of the most important conclusions drawn from the feeding trials can be stated as fundamental principles that must be followed in successful and profitable lamb fattening. Anyone desirous of making a study of the detailed reports of the feeding trials may secure a copy of the reports by writing to the West Central Experiment Station, Morris, Minn.

Purchase of Feeder Lambs

One of the most important items in the profitable fattening of lambs for market is the purchase of the lambs. The feeder should avoid especially heavy, rangy, coarse lambs weighing 70 pounds or more. Such lambs generally persist in growing, and fatten slowly when put on feed so that by the time they are fat enough to suit the packer, they are too heavy to suit him and can seldom be made into market-topping lambs. Small-sized, unthrifty appearing lambs should also be

avoided as they will be slow gainers, the death loss will be heavy, and many will never make market-topping lambs. The ideal feeder lamb should be short legged, have a short neck, be smooth and compact of body, and should weigh from 50 to 65 pounds, with 55 to 60 pounds as the ideal weight at the beginning of the feeding period. It matters not if such a lamb is of western or native origin and it matters not whether it is of "white faced" or "black faced" breeding; it will be a desirable feeding lamb just the same. If the feeder is not an experienced judge of lambs and does not himself understand market quotations, he will be money ahead to secure the service of a reliable commission order buyer in making the purchase.

"Filling Lambs"

Lambs usually shrink from 4 to 7 pounds per head from point of shipment in the west or from a central market to the farm of the feeder. They arrive at the farm of the feeder tired, empty, hungry, and thirsty. They want, and should have, first a drink of water, then some rest and a slow fill on some such feed as prairie hay, clover and timothy mixed hay, or a pasture that is not too green and rich. A native prairie grass pasture, a blue grass pasture, or a second growth timothy meadow are suitable pastures on which to fill lambs when first taken off cars. Lambs should not be turned directly into a green cornfield, on a green grain stubble field, or on green alfalfa or sweet clover; nor should they be fed entirely on alfalfa hay during the first few days. Any

of these methods of starting will likely result in considerable scouring, some bloating, and some death loss.

Starting on Feed

A little whole oats or oats mixed with barley or shelled corn makes an ideal grain ration in starting lambs on feed, tho they can be started on corn alone or barley alone if the oats is not available. Lambs, not accustomed to getting any grain, should be fed not more than one fifth to one fourth of a pound of grain per head a day as their first feed. This should be increased gradually, just a very little each day, using three to four weeks' time to get them up to all the grain they will clean up in two feeds per day, or in getting them ready to go on a grain self-feeder. If alfalfa hay is to be used as the roughage in fattening lambs, it is advisable to use only one feed of alfalfa per day and one of some other roughage such as prairie hay or timothy and clover for about the first week, after which the alfalfa hay can be fed as the only roughage. Starting lambs on all the good, green alfalfa hay they can eat will often cause scouring and may cause some bloating.

The "Full Feed" Period

Once a group of lambs have been successfully put on a full feed of grain, fattening them and finishing for market is simple.

As determined by the feeding trials conducted by the University at Morris, the best method is feeding lambs twice a day all the grain they will

clean up well at each feeding. If hay is also fed twice a day, the best results will be secured with the least waste by feeding an amount that the lambs will clean up. According to the trials conducted at Morris, one of the most profitable rations and methods of feeding in fattening lambs is to feed ear corn and alfalfa hay. Lambs will shell off the ear corn readily. In this ration, if high quality alfalfa hay is being fed, it is often necessary to limit the amount of hay to about one pound per lamb a day in order to get the lambs to eat enough corn to fatten as rapidly as they should. When on a full feed, lambs weighing from 60 to 85 pounds should eat from 1½ to 2 pounds of grain, and from 1 to 1¼ pounds of hay per head daily. They should gain at least 1/3 of a pound per head a day, with a total gain of 25 to 30 pounds in from 75 to 100 days. Even tho thin at the beginning, they should be fat enough to kill out well and suit the packer after being put through such a feeding period. A 90-pound home weight is an ideal weight at which to start a lamb to market if he is fat.

It was found repeatedly in the trials at Morris that adding about 1/5 of a pound of high protein supplemental feed, such as linseed oilmeal, corn gluten meal, or cottonseed meal, or a mixture of two or all three of these feeds per lamb a day invariably increased the profit. The only time this probably would not hold true would be when both grain and hay were unusually low in price and protein supplement feeds unusually high—a price relationship that rarely prevails.

In the trials at Morris, whole ear corn, ground ear corn (corn and cob meal), shelled corn, and ground shelled corn have been fed to fattening lambs. It makes little difference in the actual profit what preparation is given to corn before feeding to fattening lambs, but generally the less time and expense put into the preparation of grains for lambs, the larger will be the final profit. This means that whole ear corn, shelled corn, whole barley, and whole oats are the most satisfactory forms to feed. Special notice should be taken of the fact that altho barley must be ground to feed satisfactorily to horses, cattle, or hogs, it is very satisfactory for lambs in the whole form, and may be fed whole with equal or slightly greater profit than when ground. Those who have no corn but have a supply of barley and oats and sufficient roughage need not hesitate to undertake the fattening of lambs as results, almost equal to those secured from corn, have been secured repeatedly from barley or mixtures of barley and oats where the oats did not constitute more than one half of the grain ration. Oats alone as the only grain for fattening lambs has not proved very satisfactory. Lambs fed oats only grow too fast and fatten too slowly with the result that they finally are too big and still too thin to suit the packer when marketed. Where alfalfa hay is not available sweet clover, red clover, or alsike clover hay can be used with about equal results. Lambs can be and often are successfully and profitably fattened with prairie hay as the only roughage. Should prairie hay or any non-leguminous roughage be used, it

is highly desirable and profitable to feed some linseed meal, corn gluten meal, or cottonseed meal.

Wheat for Fattening Lambs

Altho wheat has not been used in any of the feeding trials at Morris, it is known that the low grades of wheat are very satisfactory for fattening lambs and that this year may be considerably cheaper than corn. Low grades of wheat generally run quite high in protein content (14 to 18 per cent protein) and if used with barley or oats can be depended upon to increase the daily rate of gain and to prove profitable. Wheat can be fed whole or coarsely ground.

Fattening in Corn or Stubble Fields

Altho no work has been done at Morris in the fattening of lambs by pasturing cornfields or stubble fields, it has been observed from the experience of farmers in that vicinity and in other localities that lambs can often be successfully and profitably grazed in corn or stubble fields for a period of from 20 to 60 days, and that satisfactory gains are often made from such feed. It is not wise, however, to depend on such feeds entirely. A period of dry lot feeding is usually essential following the grazing to insure profit from cornfield or stubble field grazing. There is always a greater risk of death loss from the cornfield and stubble grazing than from dry lot feeding.

Salt, Water, Feed Racks, and Shelter

Fattening lambs should have salt before them where they can reach it readily at all times.

Block salt or flake salt may be used. Water in clean troughs or in an automatic galvanized tank is another essential. A combination hay and grain rack can be easily made at little expense. Such a rack 14 feet long, accessible from both sides, will provide sufficient feeding space for 30 lambs. Cheap shelter that will keep lambs dry and protected from wind is entirely satisfactory and is essential from October 1 on. Many beginning feeders have lost money by not providing shelter for the lambs.

Feeding Minerals and Medicinal Feeds

No work has yet been done by the Minnesota Experiment Station in studying the importance or value of mineral feeds or other preparations to be added to the ration of home-grown feeds and protein supplement in lamb fattening. Results secured from the rations of home-grown feeds properly supplemented with protein have been so satisfactory that we feel justified in advising the lamb feeder to proceed conservatively in spending money for mineral mixtures or other feed preparations that may be offered to him at a price of several dollars per hundred pounds with the claim that they possess a miraculous power for increasing gains or decreasing feed requirements.

The purpose the farmer should have in mind in fattening lambs for market should be to increase the value of the lamb by making a better carcass of it and to increase the selling price of his feeds by converting them into a higher priced product.